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FAR EASTERN TOPICAL TALK - MARCH 1ST 1985

Journalists' visit to East Timor
Reuters Despatch from Dili, East Timor by Peter Millership.

CUE: Three journalists from Reuter, Associated Press and the Asian Wall Street Journal have been visiting East Timor, the former Portuguese colony which was incorporated by Indonesia in 1976. This is the first visit to the territory by foreign journalists in eighteen months. Peter Millership of the Reuter News Agency has sent this despatch.

The head of the Catholic Church in East Timor has accused the Indonesian military of executing 84 men, women and children during a security operation last year. He said in an interview with the first foreign reporters allowed into East Timor in 18 months that villagers in the eastern district of Viqueque had given him a list of the victims. The list included the names of teenage schoolboys, he said. The dead were buried in two mass graves, he said. "I saw the graves. The places where these people were buried. In one place about 70 and in another place 14".

He accused the military of carrying out the executions in a security sweep last August or September after 16 army engineers were killed by guerrillas of Fretilin, the revolutionary front for an independent East Timor, in the village of Claras.

Belo, a 37-year old Timorese, was appointed apostolic administrator of East Timor by the Vatican in May 1983, after his predecessor was withdrawn under pressure from Jakarta following his outspoken criticism of Indonesian rule.

But Mario Carrascalao, Governor of the former Portuguese colony annexed by Indonesia in 1976, said the allegations by Monsignor Carlos Belo, Bishop of Dili, were untrue. In a separate interview, the Governor said up to ten people might may have been killed in the anti-Fretilin sweep, as some villagers were, inevitably killed in crossfire during the sporadic clashes still taking place between troops and Fretilin.

Indonesian officials said Bishop Belo's allegations contained inconsistencies. They said he had earlier quoted villagers as saying that troops killed 200 people in the massacre but he now said he had the names of only 84.

Bishop Belo had not himself seen the bodies, they said, and had not visited the graves near Claras until two months after the incident which sparked the military sweep. However, the Governor said that if as many as 84 people had been killed, the whole of East Timor would have known about it and there would have been a revolt.

Residents who formerly had links with Fretilin contacted by Reuters in Dili also said Bishop Belo's figure of 84 seemed high. But the Bishop said : "I have the names of men, women and some schoolboys about 14 or 15 years old".